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Apples. One of my favorite fruits: Eaten fresh off the tree or made into applesauce, with a bit of cinnamon sprinkled on top. Apple fritters for breakfast. Apple cider to drink. Apple dumplings for dessert.

Last week while on vacation visiting my daughter and her fiancé Brian, we went apple picking in an orchard where we could sample a few bites before collecting numerous apples off the trees. We found several sweet varieties, quickly filled our sacks with an assortment of flavors, and then ended our excursion with an apple cider donut.

While tasting all these apple treats, I began to wonder how apples got such a bad reputation in the book of Genesis. The book offers a story about beginnings, wondering about the age-old question: Why do we exist? How did we get here?

This story was told and written long before our scientific theories of the big bang, evolution, and the interaction between organic elements, ideas which offer some suggestions about how life

started. Genesis, however, wasn't so much concerned as *how* life started, but *why* it started. The story still offers us thousands of years later an insight into why we're here.

First, the story suggests that life began in relationship with God, as a partnership to be caretakers of what God had created. We were made in God's likeness, to be like God, in caring for the world, naming the animals, and tending the garden. We've all heard the concerns about our environment today, about rising temperatures and sea levels and the melting of polar ice. Rather than viewing the world as something to consume, Genesis suggests that we serve as stewards, as caretakers of this gift God has provided us.

A second thing Genesis reminds us is that we have limits to what we can know and do, symbolized by a tree in center of the garden that was off-limits for eating.

"You can eat of anything," God explained, "but don't eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Although the story never mentions the kind of

fruit, the apple got the blame in Western Christianity, possibly due to a misunderstanding of the Latin word for *sin*, which sounds familiar to the Latin word for *apple*.

Others have suggested the fruit was a grape, fig, pomegranate, or a banana, fruits that were native to that part of the world. Regardless of the kind of fruit, it represented knowing the difference between good and evil, losing one's innocence and naivety, and facing temptations, which is a third point of the story. If you've ever watched young children at play, you can catch a glimpse of that innate innocence of childhood, for they don't worry about the complexities of the world, but then we all grow up and deal with temptations, as was the case at a church carry-in meal.

At a church luncheon buffet line, next to the apples was a sign that read: "Apples—take one per person. Remember, God is watching." A little farther down the line, next to the cookies, someone had scrawled with a crayon: "Cookies—take all you want. God is watching the apples."¹

Tempting, isn't it? To take more cookies or apples or anything else than we need?

Genesis continues the story about the tree of knowledge of good and evil when a snake-like figure suggested that eating the fruit will open our eyes, will help us become like God, knowing good and evil. That's tempting, isn't it? To become god-like? To have power to do whatever we want? To have unlimited knowledge?

When the humans ate of the tree of knowledge, they realized they were naked and they sewed together some fig leaves to cover themselves. Once again, the story illustrates the notion of leaving behind the innocence of childhood, becoming shameful of our bodies.

I remember when my daughter was young and noticed some of the tasks of adulthood—paying bills, going to work, attending meetings. She said to me, "Daddy, I don't think I want to grow up. It doesn't look like much fun." How many of you have ever felt like adulthood was too complicated, longing once again for the innocence of childhood?

When God entered the garden and found the humans hiding, God wondered how they knew they were naked. The man said, “The woman gave me some fruit,” and the woman said, “The snake tricked me into eating it.” I think the story reflects our common temptation to blame others rather than to take responsibility for our own actions.

We all make mistakes, which is a fourth teaching Genesis highlights, but most of us are reluctant to admit those times we fall. Even some theologians throughout the ages have tried to blame our current mistakes on those first humans, suggesting that because they fell and sinned, that’s the reason all the rest of us fall.

Timothy Merrill, in his book *Learning to Fall*, suggests:

In life, as in skiing, falling is inevitable. We all do it. We all have those disagreements with our spouses, parents, employers and friends. We have bad days. We make decisions we wish we could recall. We say things we wish we could take back. We do things we shouldn’t do. But a fall—one of those moral and spiritual stumbles we all make from time to time—doesn’t

constitute a failure unless we let it. Getting back up is part of every falling experience.²

That leads to a fifth point in Genesis, for after the humans recognized their nakedness, God provided clothing for them as they leave the innocence and safety of the garden. Even when we fall, God remains with us, providing new opportunities as we grow and learn. You might say that as we grow up, we learn to fall up, trusting that God will catch us.

Merrill tells another story in his book about a pastor visiting someone in the hospital.

Peter Monza had some serious scars after he underwent bypass surgery. “The docs really cut me up,” he said to the pastor who was visiting him in his hospital room. “Here, let me show you.” With that, Peter threw off his robe to reveal the staples in his chest.

His pastor winced. “I don’t need to see this,” he thought to himself. “I don’t want to see this.” But later, he realized that he really did need to see the scars of his church members. All of them. No matter how ugly.

“That’s what I am here for,” Merrill wrote. “They need someone who will look with

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compassion upon the scars of their life, who will know and understand their hurts and the deep aches and pains of their souls.”³

Since we all have fallen, our falls connect us to one another, helping us listen to the struggles and scars that we all encounter. Whether we face the scars of surgery, the scars of broken relationship that have cut us, or the scars of moral failures that lead to severe consequences, God continues to

reach out to all of us, catching us, and helping us to fall up and walk again.

¹ Hodgkin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #397.

² <https://timothymerrill.net/learning-to-fall/>

³ www.homileticsonline.com, 3/5/17.